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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004955

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SUBJECT: IRAQI HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS ON WAY AHEAD

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY POLCOUNS ROBERT S. FORD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
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AND (D).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. A group of Iraqi non-governmental organizations (NGO) told PolOff and DRL representative on December 7 that capacity-building is the greatest need of most NGOs in Iraq. They said it is especially difficult for independent NGOs to sustain themselves and they often rely on donations from their own members, as well as from wealthy patrons, to carry out their work. Many NGOs do not know where to look for funding, which they say donors often provide only to a small community of NGOs, or how to write proposals to obtain funding. Attendees noted that the Ministry of State for Civil Affairs has not effectively paved the way for the growth and sustainment of civil society, and has established cumbersome registration requirements. They unanimously agreed that the most critical human rights need is addressing poverty. END SUMMARY.

KEY NGO REQUIREMENTS ACCORDING TO NGOS

12. (C) A group of Iraqi non-governmental organizations (NGO) told PolOff and DRL representative Vitessa Del Prete on December 7 that capacity-building is the greatest need of most NGOs in Iraq. Transitional National Assembly member and Failee Kurd Samia Aziz said that, as is the case with many NGO leaders, she supports her organization with her salary. Not only was she unaware of donor funding that is available for the type of work in carried out by her NGO (providing financial support to financially disadvantaged youth and orphans), but she claimed to have no idea how to develop proposals to solicit such funding.

13. (C) Buthaina Suhail, board member of the Women's Alliance for a Democratic Iraq and head of the Iraqi Family Society, agreed with Aziz, stating that many NGOs, particularly independent NGOs, rely on donations from their own members, as well as from wealthy patrons, to carry out their work. Head of the women's branch of the Iraqi Islamic Party Faria Hadeed said that her organization, while the beneficiary of some small grants, has sustained its work -- which focuses on empowering women economically, politically, and socially -- primarily through donations. All also complained that donors routinely fund the same small community of NGOs.

14. (SBU) All the roundtable participants agreed that it is especially difficult for independent NGOs to sustain themselves. NGOs associated with political parties and religious groups have a distinct advantage over independent NGOs, they said, because the infrastructure to support their work is provided by the sponsoring organization. (NOTE: USAID has a USD 43 million grant with the Americas Development Foundation that is designed to address NGO capacity-building and sustainability issues. Under the USAID program, four civil society resource centers have been established in four regions to provide technical assistance and small grants to Iraqi civil society organizations. END NOTE.) Meeting attendees also said the State Ministry for Civil Affairs has not effectively paved the way for the growth of civil society -- especially for independent NGOs. Suhail said she has not even bothered to register her NGO due to what she considers to be excessive registration requirements. (NOTE: The TAL requires that all NGOs register with the Government. END NOTE.)

GOVERNMENT MISSES THE MARK ON HUMAN RIGHTS

15. (C) When asked to identify the most critical human rights-related gaps, Suhail stated that, while democracy-building is necessary, "hungry people do not care about democracy -- they care about getting food." However, she pointed out that the Government has not focused on the real needs of the people -- the same needs that several of their NGOs address. "We do not need more mosques," she insisted, "We need schools, orphanages, and homes for the poor." Her counterparts agreed, estimating poverty levels to be between 50 and 70 percent and said they are especially acute in the South. (NOTE: According to the Iraq Living Conditions Survey conducted in 2004 by the Ministry of

Planning and Development Cooperation in coordination with UNDP, 28 percent of households describe themselves as "among the poor in Iraq." END NOTE.)

COMMENT

16. (SBU) Roundtable participants represented a cross-section of many of Iraq's ethnic, religious, and political orientations. Despite their differences, all attendees conveyed the same message -- NGOs are key players in addressing the problems the country is facing, but still require assistance to develop the necessary capacity to be effective. This is evident in the growth of Iraq's civil society and the increasing effectiveness of many NGOs -- despite the challenges they face. As a fundamental component of Iraq's human rights infrastructure, it is critical that we support the growth of Iraq's nascent civil society and ensure that NGOs develop the tools, knowledge, and capacities to implement and continue successful projects. We will continue to work with our interlocutors -- within the Government, the international community, and civil society -- to identify opportunities for capacity-building, including funding availability and NGO advocacy, as well as to leverage existing capabilities. END COMMENT.
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